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SUBJECT: ESTONIAN CONCERNS OVER AZERBAIJAN

REF: STATE 99391

¶1. (SBU) On July 26, we delivered reftel points to Toomas Lukk, MFA Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, concerning USG concerns over the state of democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan. Lukk responded that the GOE fully shares U.S. concerns and is keen on doing more in Azerbaijan and central Asia in general. However, he noted, although resources will likely prevent any significant increase in assistance in the next year, the GOE does have contact with Azerbaijani officials. On June 18-19, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip attended the GUAM Summit (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) in Baku. While there, PM Ansip met with President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Artur Rasizada who both expressed a desire for closer Estonian-Azerbaijani relations. GOAJ officials said they see Estonia as a model in reforming Azerbaijan's economy and society.

¶2. (SBU) Given that Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova are priority countries for Estonian development assistance, GUAM's fourth member, Azerbaijan, would be a natural addition to Estonia's program. Lukk noted the MFA recognizes it should do more for Azerbaijan and other countries in the neighborhood. The MFA is in the early stages of planning an outreach program to central Asia. The MFA is especially interested in working together with the U.S. on assistance projects to promote democracy, human rights, and media freedom. Lukk reiterated the point that Estonia's shared history with the former Soviet republics and its reputation for successful political and market reforms, lend Estonia a great deal of credibility in the region. Estonia needs to take advantage of its "window of opportunity" -- where many Estonians still speak Russian and can communicate easily with Central Asians and others.

PHILLIPS